

HOUSE BILL 1: FAMILY & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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House Bill 1 (HB1; Sec. 3313.821 and 3313.822), the new education reform package for Ohio, prioritizes the importance of family and community engagement for school, district and community improvement planning. Specifically, HB1 requires each school district's board of education to appoint a Family & Civic Engagement (FCE) Team. These teams can support students' academic achievement, healthy development, and overall school success through effective collaborative processes and improved civic capacity. This brief summarizes the importance of school-family-community collaboration to these expanded planning processes. Additionally, this brief highlights the membership and responsibilities of the FCE Team as mandated by HB1, as well as how the FCE Team relates to existing district leadership teams and planning processes. Throughout the brief, the importance of local Family and Children First Councils (FCFCs) to these efforts also is discussed.

IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL-FAMILY-COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

As districts begin to expand traditional, academic-focused district improvement models, they are increasingly turning to broader models that prioritize a more comprehensive approach to whole-child development. These expanded district improvement models typically include an emphasis on three priorities: (1) improving academic outcomes; (2) addressing barriers to learning; and (3) promoting positive youth development (Taylor & Adelman, 2005). Examples of such non-academic barriers may include poverty, student mobility, truancy, or mental illness, among others (e.g., Heimlen & Schinn, 2000). The strength of these newer models is that they simultaneously prioritize academic outcomes and support overall social-emotional development (Elias, 2003).

As districts may struggle to address these priorities, especially because of limited resources, it is often critical to consider school-family-community collaboration as a key component of expanded improvement efforts. While traditional improvement is typically limited by in-house capacities, school-family-community collaboration offers districts opportunities to address students' needs by effectively partnering with families, community-based organizations, local initiatives, and other key partners such as FCFCs (Anderson-Butcher, 2004; Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004). Oftentimes, these partnerships and collaborative processes result in civic capacity, a key component of complex reform initiatives. Civic capacity, including large-scale community problem-solving, is the result of planned and purposeful efforts to organize and mobilize for collective action (Stone et al., 2001). Districts can better meet the needs of their students and improve academic outcomes by utilizing effective family and community engagement that enhances civic capacity.

In addition to civic capacity, district improvement processes that include family and community engagement often results in the development of new capacity-related innovations in districts, schools, and communities (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2009). Because of the complex, systematic change required with expanded models, districts often develop new ways of operating or "doing business." Research on district improvement efforts demonstrates nine categories of capacity-related innovations developed by districts, schools, and communities (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2009). Table 1 presents these categories and an example of each.

TABLE I. CATEGORIES OF CAPACITY-RELATED INNOVATIONS

Category	Example
Expanded Professional Development and Learning	A school community agency offered a teacher training to present information from a community resource handbook
Enhanced and Expanded Funding Streams	One district created a strong partnership with their County Job and Family Service Department which resulted in new funding for school mental health workers
Changes in operational policies and procedures	One school created a single point of contact for teacher referrals
Enhanced systems and structures	A district expanded their district improvement team to include community representatives
Changes in roles and responsibilities	A district administrator's role was redesigned to oversee learning supports and community partnership development
Enhanced integration with Comprehensive Continuous Improvement Plans (CCIPs)	One district included both academic and non-academic barriers to student success in their CCIP and district improvement plan
Expanded use of multiple data sources	A district collected data on child well-being, including risk and protective factors, as well as climate to complement the academic and behavioral data traditionally collected for planning purposes
New and expanded family and community partnerships	One district developed a strong relationship with Help Me Grow, an early childhood initiative managed by FCFCs
Enhanced programs and service delivery	One district strengthened their after school program by hiring teachers within the school, in turn allowing for better alignment between out-of-school activities and classroom curriculum

The FCE Team mandated by HB1 will serve as one mechanism to support the development and maintenance of capacity-related innovations such as those outlined in Table 1.

WHO ARE THE MEMBERS OF AN FCE TEAM?

Per the legislative language of HB1, each school district's board of education determines the membership and organization of this team. To best support collaboration throughout the school community, HB1 requires that each FCE Team include parents, community representatives, health and human service representatives, business representatives, and others as identified by each board. For example, an important stakeholder to include in the FCE Team that can bring critical resources and support student success is a representative from the district's local FCFC. Another valuable stakeholder might be a representative from a local faith-based organization. Together, all of the members comprising the FCE Team should be key stakeholders that have vested interests in the overall district improvement and civic capacity of their local communities.

Regardless of membership, the "correct mix" of stakeholders is essential to successful collaboration (e.g. Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997). Lawson (2004) suggests that stakeholders may have a direct or indirect 'stake' in collaborative efforts. That is, stakeholders might directly benefit from collaboration with others (e.g. primary stakeholders) and others might indirectly benefit through the opportunities they gain as a result of the collaboration (e.g. secondary stakeholders). It may be important to consider this distinction when collaborating, especially as it may impact the functioning, effectiveness, and complexity of the group and the results it subsequently achieves. Additionally, when forming collaborative teams, there are many other factors to consider that are important to the success of the group. These factors include trust and group norms, access to resources, competing priorities, scheduling conflicts (Lawson, 2004; Rosenblum, DiCecco, Taylor, & Adelman, 1995).

WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE FCE TEAM?

The FCE Team is charged with several responsibilities to support and enhance family and community engagement throughout a school district and surrounding community. As outlined in HB1, a district's FCE Team will:

- ◆ Work with local county FCFCs to recommend board qualifications and responsibilities to be included in the job descriptions for school family and civic engagement coordinators;
- ◆ Develop five-year FCE plans;
- ◆ Provide annual progress reports on the development and implementation of the FCE plan;
- ◆ Advise and provide recommendations to the school board on matters specified by the board; and,
- ◆ Provide the school board with the FCE plan so they can submit the plan and annual progress reports to the county FCFC.

The FCE Team also is a key entity to facilitate three school-family-community coordination functions. Specifically, FCE Teams can coordinate expanded improvement planning processes to maximize school and community-based resources, work towards integrating services and programs across the service continuum, as well as facilitate infrastructure development and collaborative leadership structures across the district, school, and community.

HOW DOES THE FCE TEAM RELATE TO EXISTING DISTRICT LEADERSHIP TEAMS AND DISTRICT PLANNING PROCESSES?

While the provisions of HB1 require the development of FCE Teams, optimal expanded district improvement may be best achieved by aligning teaming structures across a school district. That is, it will be important for districts to determine whether their district leadership teams (DLT) might be expanded to include the FCE Team membership requirements, or whether one member of the FCE Team attends DLT meetings and advises the DLT on family and community engagement priorities.

In addition, many Ohio district and building leadership teams are responsible for developing and implementing continuous improvement plans, many of which are developed through the Ohio Improvement Planning Process. The alignment of these continuous improvement plans with the mandated FCE five-year plan will be important as districts consider ways to maximize important school and community-based resources. Alignment of these plans also will be important as districts submit their FCE plans to county FCFCs. FCFCs, in turn, can use these district FCE plans to inform their planning process and their resultant HB289 County Plans.

In conclusion, HB1 provides valuable policy guidance to districts, schools, and communities as they begin to expand their improvement planning processes to include important family and community partners. Ultimately, as planning processes are expanded, infrastructure is enhanced, and services/strategies are coordinated in districts, schools, and communities, better outcomes on behalf of all Ohio students can be achieved.

The Ohio State University partners with the Ohio Department of Education to provide technical assistance and support to Family and Civic Engagement grantees in Ohio. For more information, please contact:

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